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VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5611 MARCH 14, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

STUDENT UNREST IN CALCUTTA

ANNCR:

IN THE POPULOUS INDIAN STATE OF WEST BENGAL A RECENT CLASH BETWEEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND POLICE IN CALCUTTA HAS SPARKED HEATED DEBATE....AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN.

VOICE:

WITH TWO HUNDRED THIRTY-FIVE THOUSAND STUDENTS SCATTERED AMONG NO LESS THAN TWO HUNDRED TWELVE SEPARATE COLLEGES, ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA HAS GOT TO FIGURE AS ONE OF THE TOUGHEST JOBS IN THE WORLD. ADDING TO THE DIFFICULTIES FACING THE ADMINISTRATORS IS THE FACT THAT EDUCATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PRIME TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AMONG EDUCATION-MINDED, POLITICALLY ACTIVE WEST BENGALS.

MUCH OF THE RECENT FERMENT HAS CENTERED AROUND THE SYSTEM OF EXAMINATIONS AND THE LONG DELAYS IN GRADING THE EXAMINATIONS. THE FRUSTRATION CAME TO A HEAD RECENTLY WHEN STUDENTS OF THE COLLEGE OF COMMERCE LEARNED NEARLY A YEAR AFTER TAKING THEIR EXAMINATIONS, THAT ONLY NINE PERCENT OF THEM HAD PASSED. THE STUDENTS WHO FAILED MARCHE IN ANGRY PROTEST DEMONSTRATION AND TRAPPED SCHOOL OFFICIALS IN THEIR OFFICES. THE STUDENTS SAID THE OFFICIALS WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO GO HOME UNTIL THEIR GRADES WERE RAISED TO PASSING.

THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS WERE FREED AFTER POLICE SWINGING BAMBOO CLUBS BROKE UP THE DEMONSTRATION. THE POLICE ACTION PROVOKED ANGRY DEBATE IN THE WEST BENGAL STATE ASSEMBLY WHERE OPPOSITION LEADERS DEMANDED AN INQUIRY INTO ALLEGED POLICE EXCESSES. HOWEVER, THE HEAD OF WEST BENGAL'S COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT,

CHIEF MINISTER JYOTI BASU, STOOD HIS GROUND. HE BRANDED THE STUDENT ACTION "HOOLIGANISM" AND HE SAID THE STUDENTS WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT DISCIPLINE IF THEY WANTED AUTHORITIES TO LISTEN TO THEIR GRIEVANCES.

MISTER BASU'S TOUGH STAND HAS BEEN HAILED AS ONE MORE EXAMPLE OF HIS PARTY'S PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO ISSUES. THE COMMUNISTS IN POWER IN WEST BENGAL ARE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY MARXISTS, C.P.M., A UNIQUELY INDIAN BRAND OF COMMUNISM. THE C.P.M. CAME TO POWER IN WEST BENGAL THROUGH THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AFTER WINNING A CLEAR-CUT VICTORY IN ELECTIONS LAST JUNE. ONE OF THE FIRST MOVES OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS TO TAKE OVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY.

THE RECENT PROTEST DEMONSTRATION AT THE COLLEGE OF COMMERCE HAS FOCUSSED ATTENTION ON THE WHOLE QUESTION OF EXAMINATIONS. MANY PEOPLE, BOTH STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, THINK THE EXAMINATIONS NO LONGER HAVE CREDIBILITY. THERE HAS BEEN ALLEGATION OF WIDE-SPREAD CHEATING ON THE ONE HAND AND WIDESPREAD FAVORITISM ON THE PART OF TEACHERS DOING THE GRADING ON THE OTHER. BUT IN THE VIEW OF MANY THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE OF THE CONTROVERSY OVER EXAMS IS ONLY A SYMPTOM OF A MORE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM .... THE PROBLEM OF TOO MANY STUDENTS.

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE GOING TO COLLEGE WHO SHOULDN'T, IT IS ARGUED. BECAUSE THEY CAN'T FIND JOBS AFTER THEY FINISH THEIR REQUIRED SCHOOLING. ONCE THEY GET TO THE UNIVERSITY, IT IS SAID, MANY OF THESE STUDENTS ARE PREPARED TO USE ANY TACTIC, INCLUDING CHEATING, TO GET THE DEGREE THEY HOPE WILL PROVIDE THEM WITH A MEAL TICKET. TO OFTEN, SAY THE CRITICS OF THE SYSTEM, THEY END UP WITH A TICKET BUT NOT THE MEALS.

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